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### Talanoa Vā: Honouring Pacific Research and Online Engagement

Grounding our collective Talanoa: Enabling open conversations

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## Grounding our collective Talanoa: Enabling open conversations

David Taufui Mikato Fa'avae, Keakaokawai Verner Hemi, & S. Apo Aporosa

The University of Waikato  
New Zealand

Māori	Hawaiian	Fijian	Tongan	English
Tēnā koutou katoa. He mihi ki te Atua, he whakakororia tona ingoa. He mihi ki te Kingi Māori, a Tuheitia, e noho ana i runga i te ahurewa tapu o ona matua tupuna. Kei te Mihi ki a ia, otira, ki tona whare Kahui Ariki whanui. He mihi ki te mana whenua, Ngati Wairere. Tēnā koutou. Nga hapu, nga marae o Waikato Taniwharau, tēnā koutou katoa. E nga hunga ora, tenei te mihi ki a koutou katoa.	Aia ho'i, e nānā i ke Akua, Ho'āno 'ia kona inoa. Aia ho'i, nānā i kou mo'i, ka ali'i nui, Tuheitia Potatau Te Wherowhero VII. Aia ho'i, ike aku la au nā ali'i apau o Waikato-Tainui a me Aotearoa. Aloha mai, aloha mai, aloha mai kakou!	Keimami rokova ka doka na kalou levu mai lomalagi. Keimami rokova ka dokai Tui Tuheitia Potatau Te Wherowhero VII. Keimami rokovi ka dokai ira na taukei ni vanua o Aotearoa. Keimami rokovi ka dokai kemuni kece sara.	Fakatapu moe ta'ehāmai. Fakatapu mo Kingi Tūheitia Potatau Te Wherowhero VII. Fakatapu moe tangata whenua 'i Aotearoa. Fakatapu mo kimoutolu hono kotoa.	We honour and acknowledge God. We honour and acknowledge King Tūheitia Potatau Te Wherowhero VII. We honour and acknowledge the people of the land in Aotearoa. We honour and acknowledge you all.



Kia ora koutou katoa, aloha, bula vinaka, talofa lava, taloha ni, fakaalofa lahi atu, kam na mauri, wa wa wa, mālō e lelei, and warm Pacific greetings to all.

As co-editors in this special issue of the *Waikato Journal of Education* (WJE), we share our *talanoa* thoughts and open conversations from the University of Waikato in *Kirikiri* (Hamilton), a place and space that has a special relationship with Waikato-Tainui and the *Kīngitanga*. We acknowledge our ties with Māori as *tangata moana* (people of the ocean), noting the past as well as the existing *vā* connections between the *Kīngitanga* and other Pacific peoples and leaders, including the House of Tupou, the royal family of Tonga. We are also mindful of our responsibility to honour *Te Tiriti* and to the honouring of *tangata whenua* and *their mana whenua*. At the same time, we embrace the ancestral connections between Māori and Pacific people through shared common heritages (Te Punga Somerville, 2012), of voyaging, wayfinding, knowledge and *ako* by which they settled *Moananuiākea* (the Hawaiian term for the Pacific Ocean) in one of “the greatest feats in human history” (Hawaii State Legislature, 2021, n.p.). We hope this volume honours those relationships and our shared *whakapapa*, *whanaungatanga*, and *kaupapa*.

### **Talanoa across localities and generations**

In the spirit of *whakapapa* and *whanaungatanga*, this special issue brings Pacific scholars from across Moananuiākea/the Pacific—together in *talatalanoa* (a derivative of *talanoa* linked to ongoing conversations). The special issue features critical Pacific scholarship through the re-imaginings of online engagement and interactions by local and regional Indigenous Pacific educators and researchers located in the Solomon Islands, Fiji, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. Each adds diverse perspectives and expertise to open lively *talanoa* on some of the most pressing concerns facing us in education today. In an age of pandemics, lockdowns, quarantines and digital divides, their generosity and words traverse geography, classrooms, epistemologies and languages.

The *talanoa* also crosses academic generations, as pioneers and firsts, our scholarly elders (or *toulekeleka/kupuna/daunivuli*) and the next academic generation, gracing us with their wisdom and insights. In her opening wisdom, Unaisi Nabobo-Baba, the first *iTaukei* (Indigenous Fijian) woman professor and prolific storyteller, provocatively challenges the next generation of Pacific scholars to draw from our Indigenous and ancestral knowledge as cultural sources of inspiration and empowerment. As usual, her intricate wordsmithing highlights her profound reverence for Indigenous sensibilities and utterances while evoking an intimate understanding of what it means to call forth such knowledge in light of today’s challenging circumstances.

All have come together in this paper through the spirit of generosity and care. Their collective contribution to this special issue of the *WJE* is an exercise in strengthening our transindigenous connections and the close articulation of cross border interactions across geographic, temporal and spiritual spaces (Sualii-Sauni, 2017). Given the uncertainties and vulnerabilities within the post-COVID context, our call-out for the special issue was a desire to not only reach out but to deliberately visibilise Pacific ways and knowledge that have enabled our communities to survive and thrive for generations (Thaman, 1995; Vaai & Nabobo-Baba, 2017). And the authors came.

### **Grounding talanoa-vā in this work**

Pacific bodies of knowledge and histories have long sustained generations across geographic boundaries to ensure cultural continuity. In the current postcolonial era, online and digital learning has forced us to engage and re-think *ako*—teaching and learning, education, and communication across countries’ boundaries. COVID-19, the pandemic that continues to impact lives around the world, remains an influence in our discussions, notions and understanding of *talanoa* and *vā*, a core life force inherent in

*Moana* (Oceania) peoples' relational sense-making and meaning-making (Sanga et al., 2020). Negotiating the socio-spatial relations in cyberspace is what Koya-Vaka'uta (2017) affirms as the sense-making of the "multiple complexities [associated with the] various aspects of the *vā* played out as abstract spaces in real time and place" (p. 61). 'Wayfinding' or navigating educational contexts and clearly articulating peoples' relational positionality within research is about embracing the diversity and specificities in our Pacific vernacular (languages) and ways of being-knowing-seeing-doing as Pacific people in the diaspora (Fa'avae et al., 2021; Iosefo et al., 2021; Sualii-Sauni, 2017).

The coupling of *talanoa* and *vā*, as *talanoa-vā*, is deliberate and for a reason. *Talanoa* is evident and visible in higher education as a research method and methodology. In fact, in 2006, the *WJE* was an instrumental platform in enabling Timote Vaoleti's earlier conceptualisations of *talanoa* as a research method and methodology specifically from the locality of *Kirikiroa*, and is widely cited across the *moana* by Pacific and non-Pacific scholars. Compared to *talanoa*, however, *vā* is not always as popular or visible in research scholarship. Our deliberate positioning of *talanoa-vā*, coupled together with the hyphen, is to emphasise the centrality of relationality in Pacific philosophising and is our attempt to acknowledge and embrace critical interrogations and in-depth theorising as being a significant part of Pacific-centred research sense-making, meaning-making, and praxis (Fa'avae et al., 2021).

The normalising of in-depth theorisation through critical praxis (or practice) encourages wise probing that centres Indigenous Pacific concepts, ideas, values, beliefs and practices in conversation with dominant Eurocentric framings. The move to centre is to prioritise Indigenous Pacific vernacular through concepts and knowledge: "tools[s] for talking about things Tongan [Hawaiian/Fijian, and] it can also be used to talk about things that are not Tongan [Hawaiian/Fijian], provided that technical terms can be adapted, developed or borrowed as required" (Taumoeolau, 2017, p. 138). The authors in the special issue unpack their vernacular tools to interpret and analyse ways of sense-making and meaning-making linked to *talanoa* and *vā* within the virtual and online spaces across institutions and contexts for Pacific/*Moana* educators, academics and researchers.

Digging deep and embracing *talanoa* practice very much depends on the philosophical and ethical conditions of *vā* (or *veitapui* and *va tapuia*, linked to sacred and *tapu* notions in Tongan and Samoan). At the same time, *iTaukei* understanding of space is sacred and spiritual, evident in the concept of *veiyaloni* (likened to *vā*) (Government of Fiji and the Asian Development Bank [GoFADB], 2019). In the postcolonial era, we position *talanoa-vā* with the hyphen strategically to emphasise the intersections in which relationality is negotiated, made sense, confronted and interrogated (Jones & Jenkins, 2008). The hyphen is symbolic of the space in between in which diverse ideas, people and practices and their associated intimate yet intricate as well as sacred conversations and interpretations, are unpacked, which is what the authors in this special issue have provided for readers.

Similarly, positioning *talanoa-vā* within this body of critical work is to prioritise inter-generational *talatalanoa* (ongoing collective *talanoa*) between more experienced Pacific scholars and emerging researchers and educators who are still finding their grounding. *Talanoa-vā* enables a resistance against institutional norms through the critical unpacking and deconstruction of western and colonial systems, ideals and processes that continue to undermine Pacific peoples' sensibilities and ways of being-knowing-seeing-doing (Fa'avae et al., 2021), which has for a very long time implicated the growth and academic pathways of Pacific educators, academics and researchers in universities (Naepi et al., 2019). Certainly, within the University of Waikato, our collective aspiration is to utilise the valued knowledge shared by the authors to mobilise and ignite inspiration in our next generation within the institution.

## Critical questions

*Talanoa-vā*, in this special issue of *WJE* has enabled and encouraged critical conversations among Pacific educators, researchers and academics to respond to the pandemic's effect on moving learning to physically distant means. It has led us to ask, specifically, how Pacific concepts and ideas can operate

in such a physically distant context, when traditional practices and concepts are predicated on physical proximity and, moreover, how culturally responsive pedagogy, curriculum and innovation can still occur under such circumstances. These inquiries have produced the following conversations.

### Theme 1. Grounding imua and talanoa–vā at the University of Waikato

1. *Imua*: Reflections on imua, talanoa–vā and leadership in the ongoing strategic journey of a New Zealand university  
*Keakaokawai Varner Hemi, Sianiti Nakabea Bulisala, S. Apo Aporosa, David Taufui Mikato Fa'avae*
2. Grounding Pacific Practice: *Fono at the Fale* and *Veiqaraqaravi Vakavanua*  
*S. Apo Aporosa, David Taufui Mikato Fa'avae*
3. *In Our Language*: Imagining a Pacific research journal in terms of language and stakeholder position and engagement  
*Keakaokawai Varner Hemi, S. Apo Aporosa*

### Theme 2. Talanoa as relational and dialogic spaces

4. Pacific relationalities in a critical digital space: The Wellington southerlies as a leadership experience  
*Kabini Sanga, Martyn Reynolds, Adreanne Ormond, Pine Southon*
5. Re-imagining the dialogic spaces of talanoa through Samoan onto-epistemology  
*Jacoba Matapo, Dion Enari*

### Theme 3. Vā as online and digital learning spaces

6. COVID-19 and online learning experiences of Solomon Islands students at the University of the South Pacific  
*Jeremy Dorovolomo, Patricia Rodie, Billy Fito'o, Loriza Zinnie Rafiq*
7. The hanuju of writing each other in Aotearoa during COVID-19 and the coexisting event(s) of the BLM (Black Lives Matter) movement  
*Mere Taito*
8. COVID-19 muddles talanoa and vā: Perceived connections and uncertainties  
*Siuta Lau Laupea'alu*
9. Talanoa moe vā: Pacific knowledge-sharing and changing sociocultural spaces during COVID-19  
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### Theme 4. Education frameworks, learning approaches, practice and pedagogy

10. Kanne Lobal: A conceptual framework relating education and leadership partnerships in the Marshall Islands  
*Danny Jim, Loretta Joseph Case, Rubon Rubon, Connie Joel, Tommy Almet, Demetria Malachi*
11. Practising Pacific pedagogies during New Zealand's level four lockdown: Pacific early career academics and COVID-19  
*Patrick Saulmatino Thomsen, Litia Tuiburelevu, Moeata Keil, Marcia Leenen-Young, Sisikula Sisifa, Karamia Muller, Analosa Veukiso-Ulugia, Sam Manuela, Sereana Naepi*

12. Fakalukuluku: Conceptualising a Tongan learning approach in tertiary education  
*Mefileisenita Naufahu, 'Elisapesi H. Havea, Sangata A. F. Kaufononga, Siuta Laulaupea'alu*
13. *The virtual faikava*: Maintaining *vā* and creating online learning spaces during COVID-19  
*Todd Henry, S. Apo Aporosa*
14. Weaving CLES-FS and talanoa to capture Fijian student's science learnings: Exploring possibilities  
*Alvin Chand, Sashi Sharma, Simon Taylor*

The special issue provides understanding of the optimal ways to honour research connections and engagement in Pacific communities, particularly when physical distancing is a requirement for social and cultural survival. We foreground the centrality of *vā* in connecting the collective *talanoa* from across the *moana*. We hope that Pacific education and educators feel empowered and strengthened through the dialogue and conversations represented in written form on the pages, through the *talanoa*. Similarly, we encourage readers to embrace *vā* and the affiliated *talanoa* expressed through the spirit of generosity and care. Finally, we hope the coming together of *talanoa-vā* will help all of us to continue the work of those who have gone before to improve outcomes for Pacific learners, educators, families and communities through *ako*—education and learning.

*Mālō 'aupito, Mahalo nui, Vinaka vakalevu.*

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